

Oregon Has New Highway Financing Theory: Should Property Owners Pay Part of Cost?

By PAUL W. HARVEY JR.
SALEM, (U)—Oregon, the author of the modern theories of financing highway costs, might be coming up with a new one—making property owners pay part of the cost of building state highways.

Oregon was the first state to pass a gasoline tax. That was in 1917. It was the author of the system of taxing trucks according to their gross weights and the miles they travel. That system, started four years ago, already is being copied by many states.

Now the state highway commission proposes that the motorist be relieved of paying all the state highway construction and maintenance costs. It says the general public and the property owners adjacent to state highways benefit, too, so they should pay part of the bill.

State Highway Engineer R. H. Baldock says his department economists figure that the general public should pay 10 percent of state highway costs. And the property owners who benefit directly from these roads should pay 20 percent.

That would leave the road user, who now pays all the bill through gas taxes, truck taxes and license plate fees, paying only 70 percent of the cost.

If Baldock succeeds in selling his idea to the legislature, it would mean a lot more revenue for the commission. This money would make possible the completion of the badly-needed road modernizing program.

Baldock's general idea has a lot of support among state and legislative leaders. But with the state facing a general financial mess at the next legislature, it might be futile to try to levy a road tax on the general public and the adjacent property owners.

BENEFITS
It would be hard to figure how much benefit a property owner gets from a road. Baldock says a road is a matter of life and death to a motorist, and that he would pay the state for that benefit.

But how about a farmer whose land is cut in two by a modern freeway, to which he is denied access? He surely doesn't benefit by that road. In fact, the state would have to pay him for the damage.

Recent legislative interim committees on highways have recognized that the public and the adjacent property owners should pay part of the cost. But they haven't figured out what the fair share would be, or how they should be taxed for their share.

The present highway interim committee probably will study the matter, and might have a recommendation for the 1953 legislature.

How does the general public benefit? Baldock points out that the average citizen, even if he doesn't own a car, benefits by mail service, bus service, express service and many other conveniences. Good roads benefit the general economy of an area, bringing more business, more jobs and better wages.

FIREWORKS
Baldock's idea is a radical one. It will cause a lot of fireworks.

He says no other state has adopted his idea. In general, he says, "there has been a tendency all over the country during the past two decades to reduce the property tax levies for roads and to increase the burden of the road user."

Property taxes now are used to support county roads and city streets, but not for state highways.

Takes on cars and trucks, collected by the state, also are used for county roads and city streets. The counties get 19 percent of what the state collects, and the cities get 10 percent.

The highway interim committee, pointing out there is no special reason why those figures are 19 and 10 percent, probably will study the question of how much the counties and cities should get.

Italian Jets Coming Soon

ROME, (U)—Italy expects to be mass producing British-designed Vampire jet fighter planes by the end of the year.

Defense Minister Rinaldo Ossola disclosed this Wednesday and said another jet fighter, all-Italian in design and manufacture, will be ready for testing by the end of this month. Ossola spoke during a senate debate on Italy's \$500,000,000 (34) defense budget.

The Italian jet design is the country's first. The Vampire design was made available to Italy by the DeHavilland Co., its British makers. Mass production here is the result of more than a year's retooling of Italian aircraft plants.

WAR CASUALTIES
WASHINGTON, (U)—The defense department has identified 42 more battle casualties in Korea. A new list reported 25 killed, 368 wounded, 20 missing in action, one captured and 13 injured in combat zone accidents.

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